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SUBJECT: ANTI-APARTHEID POLITICAL LEADER HELEN SUZMAN DIES

¶1. (U) Helen Suzman, the internationally renowned anti-apartheid political leader who befriended the imprisoned Nelson Mandela in the 1960s, died in Johannesburg on January 11. She was 91 and her death followed a brief illness. Suzman, who assumed a seat in Parliament in 1953, for decades was among the most venerated of white campaigners urging an end to racial rule. As the liberal Progressive Party's lone representative in the all-white Parliament for a time until the mid-1970s, a period when many of apartheid's most repressive features were being devised, she used her parliamentary immunity to speak out when other avenues of protest were suppressed. She confronted members of the ruling National Party on nearly every piece of legislation it sought to implement, and once told Prime Minister P. W. Botha, "I am not afraid of you -- I never have been, I never will be. I think nothing of you." When a government minister once accused her of embarrassing South Africa with her parliamentary questions, she replied, "It is not my questions that embarrass South Africa; it is your answers." She left Parliament in 1989 and established the Helen Suzman Foundation.

¶2. (U) During the 1980s before she left Parliament, Suzman differed sharply with more radical campaigners inside and outside South Africa who were supportive of economic sanctions to press the country's white rulers toward reform, saying sanctions would hurt poor blacks more than whites. To Suzman's frustration, this led some of her critics to say she was unwittingly helping to prolong apartheid. This would be a variation on a critique she had long endured, and to some extent accepted -- that by engaging in what was largely a charade of parliamentary politics in apartheid South Africa, she became complicit, however unwittingly, in the larger deceptions of apartheid. This critique would make it difficult for members of the African National Congress (ANC), who emerged in power after the 1994 election, to embrace her despite her work against white minority rule.

¶3. (U) Tributes for Suzman's life dominated the news on January 2. The Nelson Mandela Foundation noted, "Our country has lost a great patriot and a fearless leader against apartheid." Mandela recounted, "It was an odd and wonderful sight to see this courageous woman peering into our cells (on Robben Island) and strolling around our courtyard. She was the first and only woman ever to grace our cells." Democratic Alliance leader Helen Zille said, "Helen Suzman's clarity of vision, her courage and her firmness of purpose stand as beacons to those of us who seek to take that process further." ANC President Jacob Zuma said, "Helen Suzman made an important contribution towards exposing the evils of apartheid. Her concern for the plight of political prisoners was appreciated in the country and worldwide and her contribution to the debate on the creation of a constitutional democracy was valuable." Former President Thabo Mbeki noted, "She was an exceptional South African who stood up and really maintained a principled stance against apartheid." Congress of the People leader Mosiuoa Lekota said, "No doubt, those of us who spent years of imprisonment on Robben Island will always remember with gratitude Helen's visits to the Island to inspect the conditions under which we

were kept. 'Long live the spirit of Helen Suzman.' "

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